



The President's Daily Brief

7 April 1972

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THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF

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PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

The current military situation in South Vietnam is reported on *Page 1*.

A Soviet official of the UN Secretariat claims that Moscow is concerned that the North Vietnamese offensive could adversely affect President Nixon's trip. (*Page 2*)

India is awaiting a Pakistani response to its proposed scenario for talks. (*Page 3*)

Egypt's announcement that it is breaking diplomatic ties with Jordan is another move to assert Cairo's primacy as spokesman of Arab nationalism. (*Page 4*)

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At Annex we discuss the status of Soviet military activity in the Indian Ocean.

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*FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY***SOUTH VIETNAM**

Communist activity in northernmost Quang Tri Province consisted principally of light artillery attacks yesterday, but enemy forces also probed the positions of a South Vietnamese tank battalion and a marine battalion located southwest of Dong Ha, guarding the approach to Quang Tri city. Communist units in the province appear to be regrouping for further ground action and strengthening their defenses against intensified allied air strikes. In neighboring Thua Thien Province, a South Vietnamese armored unit continued to fight a stubborn enemy force on Route 547 west of Hue for the third straight day.

No significant combat has been reported in the central highlands, but communications intelligence now confirms prisoner and defector reports that the North Vietnamese 28th Regiment is located only eight miles north of Kontum city. The North Vietnamese 2nd Division Headquarters and its 1st Regiment have been located in the central part of Kontum Province.

Nearer to Saigon in Military Region 3, the Communists this morning renewed their attack on the district town of Loc Ninh in northern Binh Long Province. The enemy infantry troops were reported to be attacking in waves, supported by up to ten tanks. A government fire base a few miles south of Loc Ninh was abandoned under Communist pressure. Additional Communist units--the headquarters of the 5th Division and the 7th Division's 165th Regiment--apparently have moved into Binh Long from across the Cambodian border. The Communists now have the equivalent of a full division in the province, including the 6th, 272nd, and 165th Regiments and the headquarters component.

There are other indications that the Communists plan expanded combat in the border provinces north of Saigon. The headquarters of their Artillery Command now appears to be located in northeastern Tay Ninh Province and its subordinate artillery regiments may also have crossed into South Vietnam from Cambodia. Another headquarters that controls Communist local units in the provinces of Binh Long, Phuoc Long and Quang Duc has also moved back into South Vietnam for the first time in several years.

The Communists have also launched a series of shelling and ground attacks in the delta provinces of Military Region 4. US air observers have spotted a large enemy force, estimated at 1,000 men, about 30 nm southwest of Saigon.

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USSR-VIETNAM-US

A senior Soviet official in the UN Secretariat told a former US diplomat on 4 April that the timing of the North Vietnamese offensive was "most unfortunate" and expressed the hope that it would not interfere with President Nixon's trip. The Soviet stressed that Moscow was in no way involved in the planning of the attack.

Such an approach, while clearly self-serving and through an unofficial channel, may reflect a genuine worry that the offensive might disturb the atmosphere of the summit. Moscow's press coverage of the attack seems slanted out of similar considerations. Thus far, Soviet media have not stressed the role of Soviet-supplied weapons.

Moscow may be unenthusiastic about the offensive because it fears it may be called on in some way to pick up the pieces if Hanoi finds itself overextended. The Soviet press has sought to convey the impression that Washington is on the verge of taking "dangerous" counteraction. The USSR has been chagrined and embarrassed throughout the Vietnam conflict by its inability to prevent the US from bombing, with relative impunity, a "fraternal Socialist state," and the Soviets naturally do not want a return to damaging air attacks inside North Vietnam.

[redacted] a North Vietnamese diplomat in Paris says that Moscow has invited party boss Le Duan to visit the USSR prior to the President's arrival.

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Any such visit--either public or private--would probably be used to reassure Le Duan that Moscow stands by the public commitment made by Brezhnev on 20 March not to sell out the interests of its allies. Such a trip would also enable the Soviets to compare notes with Hanoi on the war shortly before the summit in May.

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SOUTH ASIA

The Pakistani foreign secretary yesterday acknowledged India's written offer for a summit meeting, received earlier this week via the Swiss. He claimed President Bhutto's reply would be sent shortly. The Indian proposal calls for a preliminary meeting of emissaries before the top leaders convene.

Indian Foreign Minister Singh returned yesterday from Moscow, where he was able to persuade the Soviets to avoid any mediatory role. [REDACTED] Soviet officials have been urging New Delhi to be more conciliatory toward Pakistan, particularly on the Kashmir issue. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] Although the Indians may be trying to improve the climate for negotiations, there is no indication that New Delhi has softened its basic positions in response to Soviet advice. The Indians presumably are in no hurry for formal peace negotiations, largely because they remain skeptical about Bhutto's ability to stay in power. While Bhutto is probably willing to engage in preliminary talks, he is likely to get little progress on the issue of greatest importance to him--repatriation of 94,000 POWs--until he recognizes Bangladesh.

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EGYPT-JORDAN

Cairo's severing of diplomatic relations with Jordan is another move to maintain Egypt's primacy as spokesman of the Arab nationalist cause. Egypt has had no ambassador in Jordan since mid-1971, and relations have been cool for some time, with King Husayn's clampdown on fedayeen activity in Jordan and the assassination in Cairo of Jordanian Prime Minister Wasfi Tal adding to the strains. Libya, which broke relations with Jordan last year, may have pressed Cairo to take this step as a way of underlining the rejection of Husayn's West Bank proposal. A report in Cairo's semi-official paper Al-Ahram this morning suggests that Egypt may add an economic sting to Sadat's announcement by closing its air space to Jordanian planes.

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JORDAN-SYRIA



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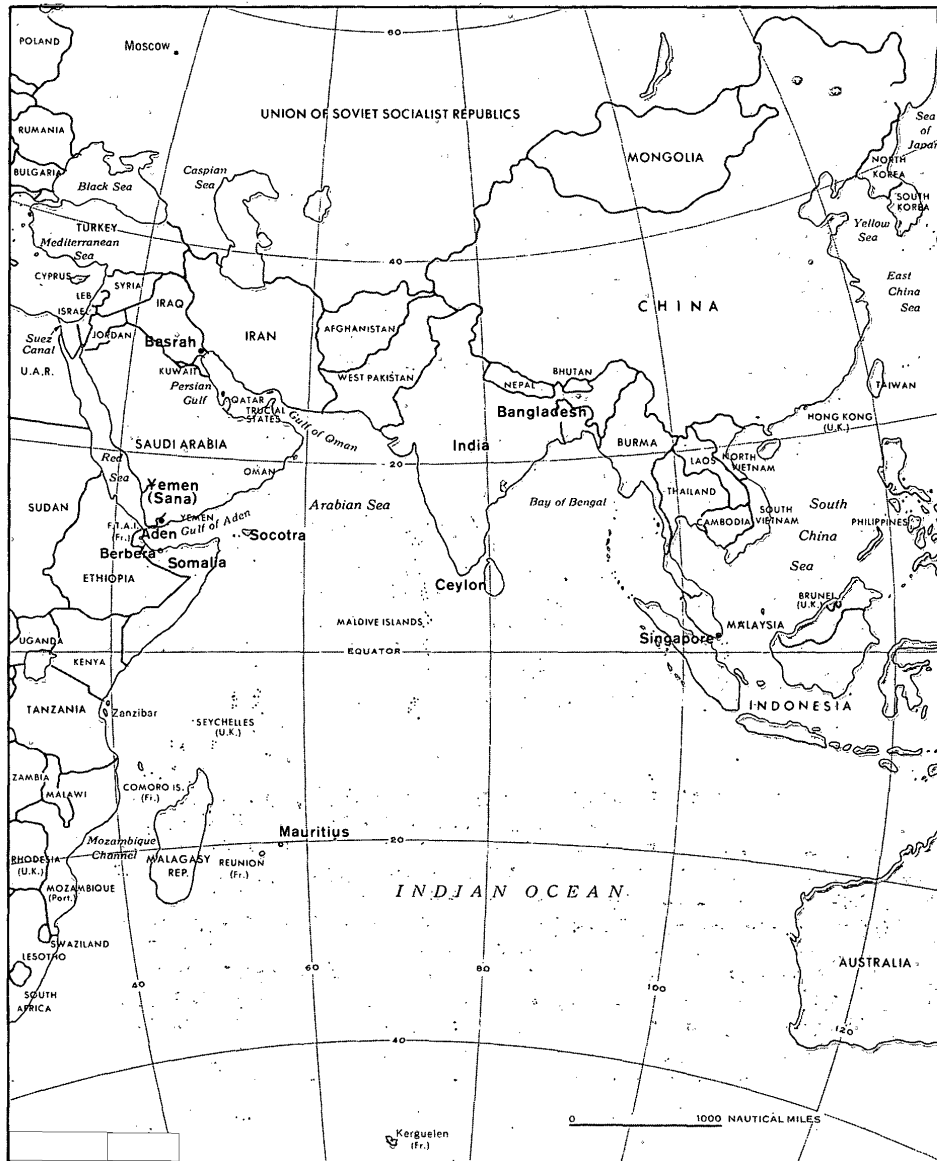
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NOTE

Chile: The resignation of the moderate faction of the Radical Party from President Allende's government is a serious blow to his personal strategy. Allende had hoped to use the faction as the core of a non-Marxist political grouping that would make his administration seem more broadly based and strengthen his own position within his Popular Unity coalition. Allende may now have to face up to the major cabinet reorganization that he promised in March, but he is likely to find it more difficult than ever to overcome the internal divisions that have hamstrung so much of his administration.

Soviet Navy in the Indian Ocean



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SOVIET MILITARY ACTIVITY IN THE INDIAN OCEAN

In a conversation during the SALT talks at Helsinki last week, Vice Admiral Sinetsky discussed Soviet policy in the Indian Ocean. He said that because the Indian Ocean is in the Eastern Hemisphere and "much closer to the USSR than the US," the Soviet Navy will maintain a presence there at least equal to, if not greater than, that of the US Navy. Sinetsky noted that the present Soviet objective in these waters is to maintain a force adequate to counter moves such as that made by the US Navy during the Indo-Pakistani war.

Sinetsky's broad outline accords well with the pattern of Soviet naval activities in and around the Indian Ocean over the past year or so. We do not believe that Moscow has yet signed an agreement with any of the littoral states for the routine use of naval facilities

It is clear, that the Soviet Navy intends to maintain a permanent force in the Indian Ocean.

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At the onset of the Indo-Pakistani war last December, the Soviet Navy had three surface combatants and one submarine in the Indian Ocean--the average force level of the past several years. (In addition, the Soviets had two space-related ships in the area--also the usual number.) Other ships were soon dispatched from distant Pacific ports to raise the Indian Ocean contingent to 11 combatants plus as many support ships.

it appears that the Soviets may have decided on a force level of four surface combatant ships and two submarines on regular patrol, at least for the next few months.

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To maintain their combatant ships on station in the Indian Ocean, the Soviets rely mainly upon the makeshift logistic techniques they developed in the Mediterranean. These include a roughly one-to-one ratio of logistic ships to combatant ships and extensive use of anchorages in international

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waters for replenishment of supplies. The Soviets have found more ports willing to welcome them for short visits in the Indian Ocean than in the Mediterranean, but they have no Indian Ocean analogue to Alexandria, Port Said, and Mersa Matruh for routine and emergency support.

The Soviets could increase the average size of the force on station by gaining permission to station a repair ship or tender in any suitable port. A shore support structure would not be necessary, but access to an airport with civil or military transport links to the USSR would be desirable for quick replacement of spare parts. Their leisurely schedule of activity in the Indian Ocean has helped the Soviets to avoid major breakdowns, but naval planners probably see a need for nearby emergency repair facilities to support any heightened activity in the future.

Mauritius, Ceylon, and Singapore have significant naval support capabilities, but all have carefully limited Soviet naval access.

--Mauritius, which offers routine support to both Soviet fishing and space support fleets, was recently persuaded by the British to purchase refueling facilities being developed by a local firm for Soviet use.

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--Ceylon has obtained military and economic aid from several sources, including the US, UK, USSR, and China, but has neither accepted aid from anyone to revitalize decaying naval facilities nor provided support to any warships. The Bandaranaike government is currently suspicious of Soviet intentions in the area and opposes any increased Soviet presence.

--Singapore's government-owned shipyard contracted last December to overhaul three Soviet whalers. This was the Soviets' first ship repair contract with Singapore. The first Soviet warship visited Singapore only last July. Singapore's proclaimed even-handed foreign policy might lead it to consider some form of support for Soviet naval ships, but the objections of the US and Singapore's Commonwealth partners, which use Singapore's extensive naval repair facilities, would constitute a major inhibition.

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India has been expanding its own navy and naval support capabilities on the basis of extensive Soviet assistance. Soviet naval ships, however, have been accorded no more support than required for limited flag-showing visits. Moscow might acquire some leverage over the new and needy state of Bangladesh, but the Indians would almost certainly veto any special privileges for the Soviet Navy in the new nation's ports.

The Soviets frequently use Aden's long-established naval and air facilities for civil and military transport, although Moscow does not appear to have acquired naval privileges there. Nor have the Soviets continued their interest in the remote and inhospitable island of Socotra, where they apparently did some work in 1970 on an airfield abandoned by the British in 1947. In Yemen (Sana) to the north, the Soviets have not for over a year used air and sea ports they built, probably for fear of becoming embroiled in the volatile relations between the two Yemens.

This situation may add to the Soviets' reasons for continuing assistance to Somali air and sea port development on the Gulf of Aden. [redacted]

[redacted] a recent agreement with Somalia [redacted] allow the Soviets to use the air and naval port improvements they have agreed to build, as well as to enjoy extended access to existing facilities. A possible major addition would be the use of the Somali airfield at Berbera by Soviet naval reconnaissance planes based in Egypt. Soviet warships have often visited Somali ports, especially during 1970 when the government feared Ethiopian incursions. Even the extended stay in 1970, however, did not result in a formal agreement for Soviet naval ships routinely or automatically to use Somali port facilities.

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The Soviets are proceeding cautiously in developing their military position in the Persian Gulf. They are assisting Iraq in the expansion of port facilities [redacted]

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[redacted] Soviet naval ships occasionally make port calls at Basrah, Iraq, but no pattern of visits has been established. Any step-up in Soviet naval activities in the Gulf would strain Moscow's improving relations with Tehran, and so the Soviets are unlikely to press for an agreement for regular naval support.

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